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More madness

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The news from Israel has remained much the same since last this column considered the occupied territories. Each day brings report of more Palestinians shot or beaten to death by security forces.

Four American physicians visited the Gaza Strip and the West Bank last week. After inspecting hospitals and examining X-rays, they concluded a pattern existed of deliberate maimings by the occupation army.

On Friday, Washington announced Secretary of State George Shultz would begin a new round of Middle East shuttle-diplomacy later this month. The secretary is looking to arrange a peace conference acceptable to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, a man who fought bitterly against the Camp David accords. The outlook for Mr. Shultz's success is not bright.

In its continuing crisis, Israel's greatest threat looms from its "friends." Rep. Jack Kemp comes first to mind, as an example. The New York Republican threw his full weight behind the bill that closed down the Palestine Liberation Organization's Washington office, and now poses an imminent threat to its New York office, which serves principally as the base for the PLO's official observer at the United Nations. The bill swept through both branches of Congress with little opposition. Timing certainly helped.

In early December, the Gaza Strip uprisings seemed little more than yet another series of demonstrations, destined for another quick ending at the hands of security forces.

Mr. Kemp and the bill's other sponsors announced they meant "to send a message." They did. Actually, it came in several parts.

The first message was that a very hard-fought election year was under way. Few active politicians want to face the juggernaut that has swept from office, in previous races, a string of prominent figures accused of being "soft" in their support of Israel.

The new law's announced intention of combatting terrorism made no sense. The only American citizen to die on U.S. soil from a terrorist act was Alex Odeh, a Lebanese-born Roman Catholic, killed by "Jewish extremists," according to the FBI. In recent years, terrorist acts against Americans abroad have been attributed to Iran, Syria, Libya, Lebanese Shiites and to Palestinian Abu Nidal, whose gang openly flaunts the PLO. Reportedly, the renegade has a murder contract out on PLO leader Yasser Arafat.

At any rate, neither PLO office in this country has ever been accused of any illegal act, as the U.S. State Department protested when the banning legislation was being drawn up.

The real message the new law sent overseas was that the Congress, if not the executive branch, was willing to assume the supine position, rather than risk the wrath of Israeli hard-liners, led by Prime Minister Shamir's Likud Block. It has refused to accommodate even the views of the late David ben-Gurion's Labor Party, which calls for the resolution of the Palestinian crisis through an international conference.

As a result, the United States finds itself increasingly isolated on the Middle East. Last week the 12-nation European Community backed the international conference concept in a statement roundly criticizing Israeli handling of the Palestinians. It should be noted that a call for even stronger criticism was led by Denmark, a nation whose people, at great risk, evacuated to safety from the Nazis almost its entire Jewish population and in a single night. The Danes are no anti-Semites.

Within 24 hours of the European statement, congressional sponsors of the anti-PLO legislation announced they had received assurances of the imminent closing of the organization's New York office, which has remained open because of UN protests that America's domestic politics were interfering with the international body's functioning.

To its great credit, the American Jewish Congress publicly seeks "realistic alternatives of the status quo that would enhance Israel's security and would avoid the demographic and other dangers of continuing an unavoidably hostile occupation (of Gaza and the West Bank)." The AJC continues to endorse the need for an international conference.

Filmmaker Woody Allen has joined a chorus of new voices from the American Jewish community, calling for an Israeli pull-back from the occupied territories. Writing in the *New York Times*, Mr. Allen expressed his horror at the the policy of beatings, killings and "starving" the Palestinians into "sub-

mission."

The principal opposition to an international conference stems from the hard-line opposition to yielding any more land captured in the 1967 war. Returning the Sinai to Egypt was more than enough. To Mr. Shamir and his backers, present-day Israel has a God-given right to all the territory acquired by the ancient Israelites in their conquests after escaping phaoronic Egypt.

In simple fact, Middle East peace, this nation's foreign policy and our domestic politics are being held hostage to the interpretation a few foreign gentlemen make of the Bible's Old Testament history.

The political survival of Israel, as a nation, is not at risk. Twice, the Palestine National Council, the PLO's legislative branch, has voted to recognize the legitimacy of the Jewish state.

Of course, the key to that nation's security lies with the United States. As former national security adviser Zbigniew Brezinski pointed out in last Friday's Washington Post: "The U.S. commitment to Israel is primarily of a moral nature. It stems from the American people's deep conviction that the state of Israel corrects a fundamental historical injustice to which much of the world, including America itself, was indifferent. It is this bond that unites America and Israel and creates an *absolute* and unique commitment to Israel's future and security."

It is this moral right which is being splintered by every bullet, billy-club and rifle butt used on the Palestinians. Closing down law-abiding Palestinian offices in this country does not help.

The madness in the Middle East goes on.